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ABSTRACT

The situation for "street children" has degenerated over the past two decades following the economic and political transitions in much of Latin America. Drawing on scholarly materials, interviews with child rights advocates, and the words of the children themselves, this book explores the abuse, limited choices, despair, loyalty, and remarkable survival skills of street children in Guatemala--youths with weak or broken ties to their families, who live and work on the streets and rarely, if ever, return to their homes. The socio-political context influencing the plight of street children is also examined. The work levels an indictment at the Guatemalan government, reciting its acts, its violation of its own laws and constitution, and its miserly allocation of funds for children's welfare. Chapters in the book are: (1) "The Scene," examining the presence of street children in Guatemala, the circumstances that bring them to the street, and detrimental shifts in government during the past 30 years; (2) "A Street Child's Reality," using the stories of and interviews with individual children to explore the home environment that landed them in the streets, and the harsh conditions encountered there; (3) "At the Mercy of the State: Street Children and the Government of Guatemala," contrasting the child protection ideal as proposed by Guatemala's constitution and the reality of government neglect and terror, and exploring the contradictions posed by the country's "Minor's Code" and its juvenile justice policy; (4) "Human Rights and the Guatemalan Street Child," chronicling patterns of abuses involving city and national police as well as harassment and intimidation of child advocate workers; (5) "The Construction of Social Indifference: Shaping Images of Street Children," examining historical, religious, and media models of childhood that encourage the stigmatization of street children and their families-these are contrasted with more favorable Mayan concepts of childhood; (6) "The Silent Majority: The Response of Private Citizens to Street Children," exploring the deeper, more personal motives held by private citizens in Guatemala that may prevent the effective protest of abuse against street children; and (7) "Restoring Humanity," examining ways to improve the well-being of street children, which will require efforts on several fronts to alleviate both the immediate conditions of these children and larger social conditions and attitudes. (HTH)